

Thursday, June 10, 1965

"PRESERVING A DUXBURY HERITAGE"

By Wm. Lord McKinney, Curator Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

(This is the fifth in a series to appear in the Clipper preliminary to the campaign of PRESERVING OUR DUXBURY HERITAGE. -- Ed.)

In 1838, when Duxbury's shipping was near its zenith, it is recorded that "Jake" Sprague, driving his stage coach from Plymouth, counted the number of operations underway in various shipyards. He reported in the yards between the "Navy Yard" (near where the late Fanny Davenport's house stood) and the Mill Pond (Bluefish River Basin) there were 18 vessels under construction. About that time in the yard near the "Navy Yard" Samuel Hall was building the ship, "Narragansett" and the "Constantine"; and probably Mr. Sprague noted preparations already underway for the great ship "Hope" as he looked east downstream from the Bluefish River bridge to Ezra Weston's "Ten Acre" shipyard.

Now the scene has changed completely. Visitors in rather swiftly moving cars see no trace of Duxbury's ship industry of earlier times. However, as they visit Powder Point the beauty of the scenery arrests the eye along King Caesar Rd. and they pause to read the marker at the Dr. Bumpus Memorial Park which tells of Ezra Weston's Pier, and across the way the charm of his residence built in 1808 makes them linger. Perhaps it is self evident that here is a silent reminder of a great industry almost forgotten. Some years ago Dr. Alice H. Bigelow wrote:

"King Caesar's house stands in the majesty of its early architecture. Its long wharf said 'goodbye' to many newbuilt ships that went round the world. In the hour of decay it has been redeemed as a park by Dr. H.C. Bumpus, Sr."

Much of the beauty and attractiveness of the King Caesar house is due to the fact that the same carpenters who were responsible for the splendor of Duxbury shipping built the house. Cornices around the tops of the rooms differ in each room; are of interesting design and beautifully made. The details of the mantles and pillars on either side of the fireplaces are most pleasing. These words are from the pen of a young lady, Lucia Knapp, who lived there many years ago, and who also mentioned the charming front doorway and the arch above over which climbed in the early summer a lovely white rose, named the "Seven Sisters."

She continues her description: "The front door leads into the long central hall. On the right of this hall is the original sitting room and beyond it what was Alden Weston's bedroom. On the left of the hall is the "best parlor" with its original French landscape wall paper. Back of the parlor is the dining room."

OLD FRENCH WALLPAPERS

"No description of the King Caesar house would be complete without mentioning the old French landscape wallpapers. These were put on the two front rooms shortly after the house was built. The one in the best parlor is said to have been given to Jerusha as a wedding present from her father, Colonel Gamaliel Bradford. These wallpapers were made in France about 1800. They were printed from wooden blocks, each piece being a square. Five or six squares form a strip, about the height of most walls from wainscoting to ceiling. Each strip forms a narrow but complete picture. There is no repetition of scene.

"The landscape wallpaper in the best parlor represents a scene in the neighborhood of Paris. Friends returning from Europe in those days often recognized one place or another....the long building over the fireplace was Versailles."

This Zuber wallpaper is older than that by the same artist which was given to Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy by the National Society of Interior Designers. A Peter Hill discovered the paper in a house about to be demolished in Maryland. The Society bought the paper from Hill for \$12,500 and presented it to the First Lady as she was redecorating the White House. She chose this paper for the Diplomatic Reception Room.

The tradition that surrounded the King Caesar house suggests that here were unfolded many of the nobler aspects of right thought and action. King Caesar was not only a princely executive with creative insight, but as we have shown, a humanitarian and idealist. Frederick Bradford Knapp, an educator of high rank (founder and principal of Powder Point School), whose interest in nature studies developed the Duxbury town forest, which was named in his honor. Dr. Bumpus, Sr., who had served as Director of the American Museum of Natural History, President of Tufts University, has been called the "Father of Museums." Dr. Bumpus and his good wife at first spent only their summer vacations as they took over the King Caesar house and added to its charm and beauty. When they were all-year-round residents, our community moved forward along several avenues of their interests. Dr. Bumpus advanced the concerns of the Rural and Historical Society in which he took an active part. With it all there were occasions of real amusement. It concerned another of the notable occupants of the King Caesar house not to be forgotten.

The story is told that Dr. H.C. Bumpus, Jr., relinquishing for a time his professional calling, was moving to Pasadena on the West Coast. Therefore he presented his parents in Duxbury with something of a rare "personality" in his gift to them of "Gandhi." Much has been written and reported about this Mina bird from faraway India. In the zoological museum of Providence the superintendent kept Gandhi at times in his office; it was during the depression of years ago. Gandhi was a gifted conversationalist and on occasion when a visitor entered to see the official in charge, Gandhi would pipe up, "Say, brother, can you spare a dime?" Talented parrots were not even at the foot of his class. Of beautiful blue-black plumage, a brilliant colored beak and large black eyes, his language impressed Duxbury. His presence at the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Bumpus added one more touch of the Orient to their friendly and joyous King Caesar home.

As visitors tarry in admiration of the scenery of the pier and "palace" of King Caesar, it is most natural to conclude that here is the symbol of the glorious heritage of which Duxbury is justly proud. Not only the Ezra Westons but the splendid company of shipbuilders

and ship captains who just two centuries ago began to enter the commerce of the world, and the enterprise prospered and Duxbury ships entered every port of importance in the wide world.

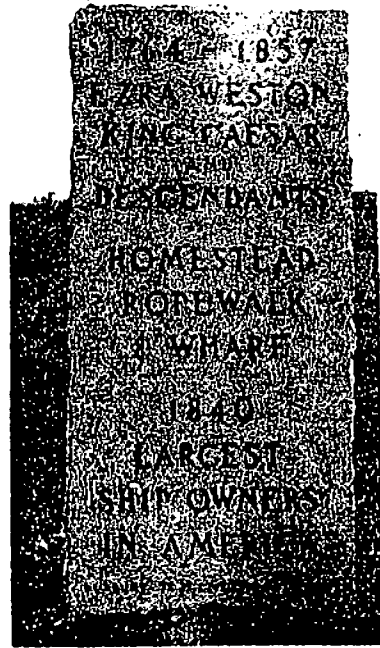
REASONS FOR ARTICLES

This series on the shipping industry is being written because this symbol of a glorious heritage has been offered for sale. Some Duxbury folk, and others greatly interested, had suggested that our townspeople seize the opportunity to purchase the King Caesar house, not as a memorial to one, but to the many Duxbury shipbuilders, sea captains the the seafaring men of a dozen generations.

(A concluding article in this series will appear in next week's issue of the Duxbury Clipper. -- Ed.)



King Caesar House in Duxbury.



Tercentenary Marker

at King Caesar House



PARLOR IN KING CAESAR HOUSE.